

State Board of Education 6/19/2013 statement

The Bellevue Special Needs PTA continues to have concerns the ESEA waiver process and the Achievement Index. After attending the Achievement and Accountability Workgroup meeting on June 12 it was clear that the special education subgroup had been, and continues to be, largely left out. It has been explained to representatives of the Bellevue Special Needs PTA that more time could have been spent on special education and that there was not a “push” from other special education groups to do any work on this subgroup of children. We remain concerned with the lack of attention being paid to this group of children and even more concerned that it takes people “pushing” for attention to be paid to Washington’s 158,000 students with disabilities, and the 138,000 of those in special education.

When OSPI applied for the waiver they committed to improving outcomes for all children including special education students. Language in the waiver states “Full and effective implementation requires an intentional focus on closing the educational opportunity (achievement) gap and reducing dropout rates, particularly with respect to English language learners, students with disabilities, and students from historically underserved populations. Elimination of these gaps is at the heart of the state’s school improvement agenda and processes.”¹ In addition, the waiver states, “The adoption of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in relationship to special education really means *new academic learning standards* and not necessarily *a new process—at least as it relates to assessment*. While the new standards may be more rigorous, the process for assessing students for services will remain essentially the same.”²

I want to share an example to illustrate why we are concerned.:

There is a 7th grade child who has autism and is in the Bellevue School Districts Functional Life Skills program. This child takes the WAAS portfolio assessment each year. In the second grade the reading

¹ Washington State ESEA Flexibility Request, Final Submission: July 5, 2012, page 34

² Washington State ESEA Flexibility Request, Final Submission: July 5, 2012 page 79

curriculum this child was successful in had them reading short paragraphs and comprehending the meaning. The following year this child had a new teacher who decided to use a different curriculum and remove the reading goals from the IEP. That new curriculum had this child reading books that only had one or two words on a page. That curriculum stayed with this child for fourth, fifth and sixth grade. It took the parents becoming strong advocates and the child getting a new teacher for the curriculum to change for 7th grade. Today, this same child is reading at a 4th grade reading level with multiple paragraphs again on a page.

Every year starting in 3rd grade, this child's parents received a letter from the governor telling them they should be proud because their child received a 4 on the state assessment, the highest score possible. How can that be if the curriculum given to this child in 3rd – 6th grade technically represented that this child regressed? Can you imagine how that felt to the parents who knew their child was not receiving proper instruction?

This same child will be entering 8th next year and the parents were recently notified their child would receive a portfolio assessment for science. The parents expressed concern that their child had no access to science curriculum and no science goals on her IEP. It was explained to them that was not necessary, that they would just ask the child the difference between hot and cold. I suspect this child will receive a 4 and the parents will receive another letter of congratulations from the governor.

We understand that many issues in special education fall back to the IEP level and school level. We understand that if a child in special education takes the MSP or the new Smarter Balanced Assessment their data will be captured in the new Index. We still need to understand what will be done for children in special education who take alternative assessments. How will we ensure that they reach their potential, that they have a measurable trajectory and that schools have the same accountability for the progress of these students as all other students?

The state must have awareness and strategies in place to make sure that the quality of a child's IEP and the implementation of the IEP are

appropriate. Is that not one of the reasons we have statewide assessments? To show that the education our children are receiving is appropriate and allowing them to progress to graduating high school with a diploma? The alternative assessment system in place is not providing that same protection for special education children and if that process is not looked into we will continue to fail many children with disabilities.

There are issues in special education that need attention. According to the Office of the Education Ombudsman, the number of Special Education complaints grew by 30% for the 2011-12 fiscal year compared to the previous year. The most common Special Education complaint issues in FY 2011-12 were related to IEP implementation, IEP development, student placement, multiple concerns and evaluation.³ In addition, according to OSPI only 56% of children in special education graduated high school last year.⁴

School Districts look to OSPI and the State Board of Education for guidance. There must be thoughtful and thorough conversations around the special education subgroup of children and how to appropriately assess them, and minimize the subjectivity allowed within the assessment process. Innovation comes out of conversations around challenges. By ignoring this group of children you are not only impacting each of them, but also impacting improved outcomes for all children.

³ 2011-12 Annual Report, The Office of the Education Ombudsman

⁴ OSPI 2011-2012 Report Card